Creating Living Neighbourhoods: Options for Renewal

Sponsored by The Ontario Ministry of Housing, Technical Support Services Branch

Introduction

One of the challenges facing every major North American city is the transformation into "living neighbourhoods" the faceless, often deteriorating, and usually crime-ridden structures that make up much of these cities' public housing stock. How to successfully meet this challenge was the subject of a 3-day seminar held in Toronto in 1987 to which noted designers, planners, and authors were invited to share their expertise. Oscar Newman, Alice Coleman, Antonio Di Mambro, Rem Koolhaas, and Jane Jacobs were only some of the experts who took part in the seminar.

The seminar focussed on the design principles and techniques that not only will enhance lives of the residents of public housing projects, but will, at the same time, instill in the residents that sense of belonging and responsibility to the community that defines "neighbourhood." At one point during the seminar, the audience was asked to consider the following questions:

- *How can existing buildings and neighbourhoods be effectively recycled and what are the ingredients to cause this to happen?*

- *How can this process of renewal and redesign be accomplished with full regard for the rights of individuals and communities in the existing situation?*

- *What are the qualities of place that should be achieved?*

- *What are the appropriate roles and responsibilities of government in controlling directly or limiting the play of market forces?*

- *Can housing be considered a thing, a function, a product by itself, or are we really talking about making neighbourhoods as places to live? Can apartments and houses be considered commodities or should they be considered a service?*

The reader is also invited to consider these questions as he or she reads through the following summary of the seminar presentations. Public housing projects from the United States, England and Europe are discussed, their problems and solutions are analyzed, and revitalization schemes for three Toronto projects are presented. Not all the seminar speakers are represented here, but of those who are, we hope their thoughts and contributions will find permanent reflection in communities and urban centres across the continent.

History of Public Housing in Ontario

Public housing got its start in Ontario during World War II when the federal department of defence created a war-time housing company. With only a handful of architects and engineers, but a lot of builders, the company built 2-storey hostels and modest bungalows. After the war, most of the hostels were demolished, the bungalows were sold to the occupants, and the architects and engineers formed the nucleus of the Central Mortgage and Housing Company, the first housing agency in Canada.

In the early 50s, the CMHC experimented with public housing. The country's first permanent housing project, Regent Park North, was built in Toronto. Designed by commissioned architects, the 3-storey housing units had long corridors and an institutional look. At about the same time, development of Don Mills, a prototypical modern suburb, was underway, built with the belief that the forms of the modern community demand a clean slate away from built-up urban areas. Subsequent housing projects in the city centre were then designed on this suburban model. Old neighbourhoods were destroyed, replaced by new higher-density housing projects. Unfortunately, the values on which these buildings were based were foreign to the tenants.

In architectural circles of the same period, the Modern style had taken hold. But with their emphasis on steel, glass and concrete, Modern buildings proved harsh and monotonous, tending not to reflect the social aspirations of the users. Once the style had become established, functional planning gave way to the old tradition of squeezing internal areas together to fit a predetermined three-dimensional form. Ironically, the result was contemporary-looking housing and supposedly functional buildings that were impossible to live in.

In the late 50s, CMHC granted responsibility for much of public housing to provincial agencies. The Ontario Housing Corporation (which didn't even have an architect on staff), commissioned land-owning developers to build housing developments. Concerned mainly with cost-efficiency, the developers constructed the most economical buildings—the highrise. Consequently, from 1964 to 1972, the Canadian architect was a very small player in public housing.

All these factor conspired to give public housing a bad reputation in the eyes of the public. In 1972, the OHC, realizing that the wrong form of housing was being bought, hired more architects. It also developed guidelines for the planning and design of public housing, which stated (and continues to state) that 3-bedroom family accommodation should be in the form of detached housing, semi-detached housing or townhouses only. If 1-and 2-bedroom housing is required, only then should apartment housing be considered. Since 1972, no family highrise has been built by the OHC.

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NEWMAN

Oscar Newman

Perhaps the most complex environment to design is housing because it deals with whole facets of people's lives. When architects design housing, they create stagesets for the life performances of other people. The upbringing of the residents, their interaction with family members and peers, their daily activities, their status in society are all influenced by their home environments. That's why housing must address the way people use spaces, what they expect of them, and how they perform in them.

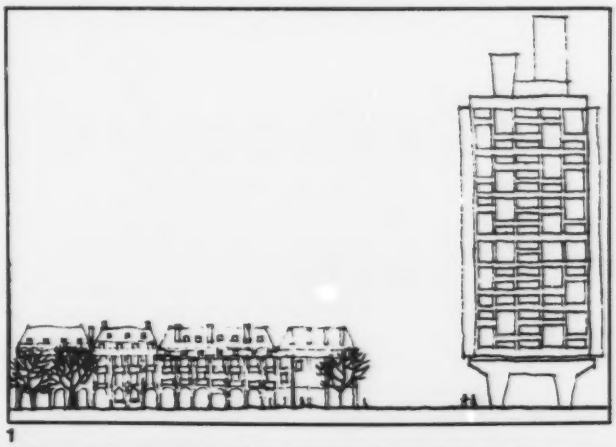
Unfortunately, much public housing has failed miserably in these regards, largely because it's designed and built without considering the people who will live in it. The values and perceptions of the designers are estranged from those of the future residents. Often, too, there's an incredible gap of misunderstanding between the architect's vision and good intentions and the reality that results. Consider the idealists in the 1950s who, inspired by Le Corbusier's utopian vision of buildings for families that would "float in the air" to free up the grounds for play, built housing in which the families felt so disassociated from the ground that they couldn't send their children down to play with any sense of safety.

The unfortunate reality is that architects have traditionally allowed their "ingenuity" and "individuality" to get in the way of responding to real needs. They prefer to create something original rather than add 10% of their own creativity to someone else's design of proven success. This problem has its roots in our architectural schools where we ask the students to design from thin air, based on no experience and no notion of success or failure.

To build a housing community, you must be aware of the narrow reality of what man is. Many of our present environments have been created in an attempt to build a new utopia based on a fundamental misconception of the nature of man. Man is an inherently selfish creature, and his operating principle seems to be: "If it's mine, I take care of it. If it enhances my life and lifestyle and my identity, I'll take care of it. If I share it with many more people and my identity is lost, why should I take care of it?"

Taking into account that principle, then, we can move on to a discussion of what makes successful housing and a "living neighbourhood," and how differently designed buildings mesh with different lifestyles, age groups, and family types.

It's not enough to say a highrise is bad, who is it bad for?



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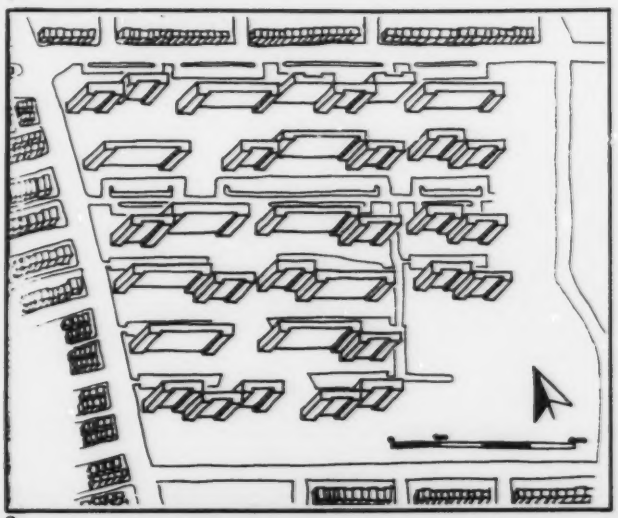

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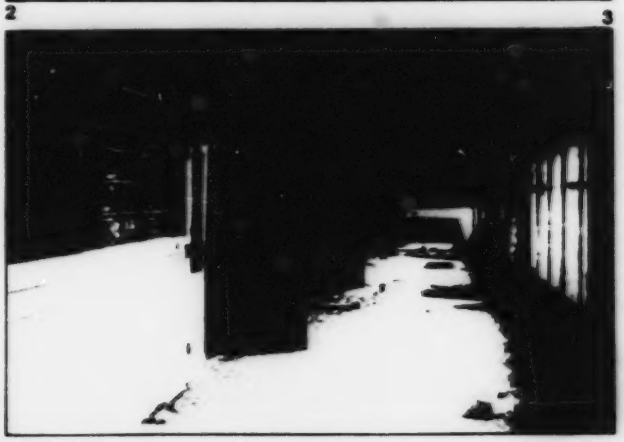

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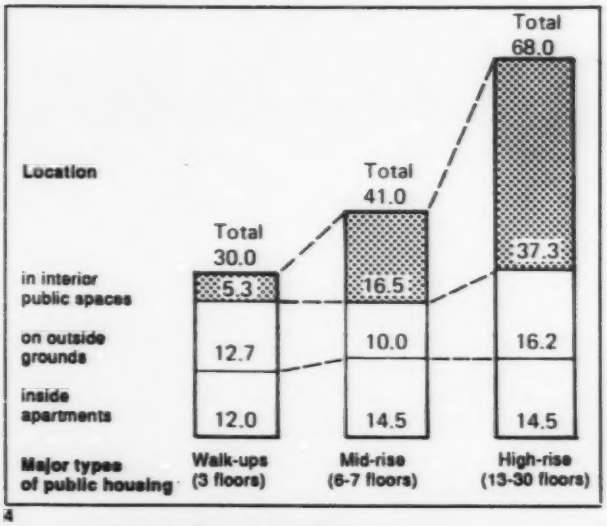
1 Le Corbusier's "street in the air" housing concept in which the grounds were freed up as open public space.

2 Site plan of Pruitt-Igoe, St. Louis, on grounds intentionally left open as a "river of trees" for enjoyment by residents and adjacent communities.

3 View of what was supposed to be a highly-used gallery in Pruitt-Igoe project. Such areas, disassociated from apartment unit entries, are underused, even feared by the residents.



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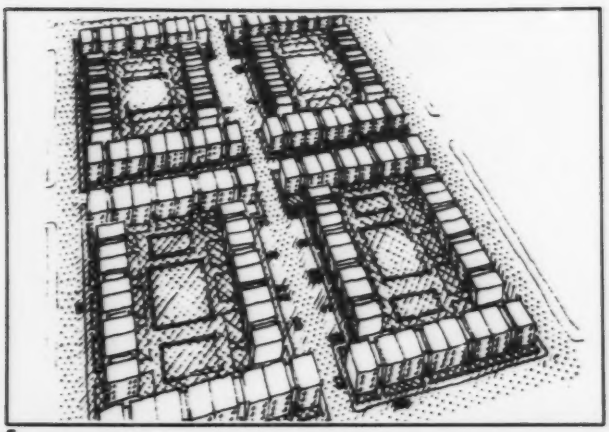

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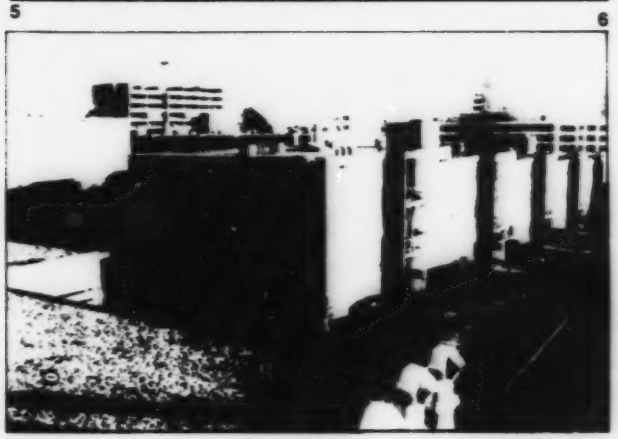


Although highrises are suitable for some family types, they tend not to work for families with children, especially in public housing projects. Research shows that the crime rate increases with the building height, particularly crime in the interior public spaces.

The reason for this is simple. In the traditional single-family house, all the space within the four walls as well as the front and back yards are the private property of the family. That group controls who can come and go, and all the activity that takes place on the property. Even the street abutting the privacy of the front yard becomes, by association, semi-private.

At one time, most housing was single-family, but as the urban areas increased in density, housing had to compete with commercial operations for disappearing space in the desirable locations. To remain competitive with the commercial operations, which could afford to pay more for the land, housing had to increase its density. Walk-ups were built, in which certain areas of the building—stairs, lobbies, halls—had to be shared by a few family groups.

Where those families came to know each other and to develop common bonds, the control of these public areas was still possible. Garden apartments, with two families on each of three floors, is a good example. The common interior spaces, used by only a limited number of people of one's own acquaintance, were seen as an extension of the private apartments and were cared for as such. The grounds of these buildings were easily supervised for children's play and were accessible enough for sitting, entertaining and dining.

As urban densities increased further, highrises housing as many as 350 families were built. A common entry, elevators, stairs and corridors could be shared by 1,500 people. Residents could no longer distinguish neighbour from intruder or identify that part of the communal space as their own. They withdrew into their apartments and wanted nothing to do with the interior stairs and halls. The principle of "If it's not mine, I'm not going to look after it," came into play. Neglect and misuse of the building and then crime became rampant.

As well as the physical factors of sheer size and numbers in such buildings, two social factors commonly associated with residents in public housing—the number of welfare families with a female head and the ratio of teenagers to adults—served to make highrises even more unworkable. All four factors directly affect the abandonment and turnover rates, and can predict as much as two thirds of the crime, vandalism and vacancy rates in buildings with families with children or a 50/50 mix of families with children and the elderly. Such buildings are also among the most costly to maintain in terms of management cost per unit.

4 Crime rate, especially in interior public spaces increases with building height. (N.Y.C. Housing Authority data, 1967)

5 Four-block, 3-storey walk-ups where six families share a common entrance. The semi-private nature of the interior grounds allows for control and supervision.

6 St. Francis Square, San Francisco. The individuality of each 6-family unit is further exaggerated by the stepping of the buildings in and out and up and down the hillside.

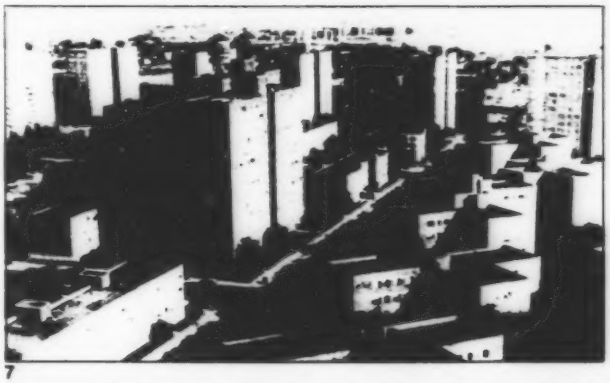
This is not to say, however, that highrises of this density can't work for families at all. They do work for well-off families, who can pay gardeners, security officers, door and elevator operators to supervise and maintain the public spaces. The kind of attention necessary to mak. a highrise work isn't possible for the poor to replicate. Also, the wealthy can afford to send their children away for recreation and vacations. The children of the poor, on the other hand, find diversion in the elevators and garbage chutes. Crime leads from there.

What's the answer, then? It's important to note that although the crime and vandalism rates increase with the building height, it's not a curve that goes on indefinitely. It rises significantly after about 60 families per entry, but eventually levels off. Opportunists might say, then, that since the crime and vandalism cannot get much worse, the building might as well be increased to 350 units.

But another factor comes into play that affects the success of the building: public perception. According to the Ontario Ministry of Housing and the U.S. Federal Department of Urban and Housing Authority, the ideal ma'.imum number of units in a public housing project is 40 regardless of the building type. (For densities of up to fifty units per acre, 3-storey townhouses, walk-ups and 6-storey towers are preferred solutions. Higher densities mean building highrises.) If a public housing project gets too large, a feeling of defeatism on the part of management, a why-should-I-work-for-a-living-to-take-care-of-these lazy-no-goods attitude develops. This feeling is shared by the police and garbage collectors and municipal services people. An US and THEM syndrome is created.

To achieve the proper ratio of entrances to residents, some designers have tried slicing the highrise vertically into parts and providing several entries. The problem here is cost. The costs of installing more staircases, elevators and entries will far outweigh the positive effects of the change. The building could, however, be subdivided horizontally, locating all the large 3-bedroom apartments for families on the ground floor or in 2-storey units on the ground and second floor, and the 1-and 2-bedroom units on the remaining floors for the elderly, small families and singles. This scheme doesn't involve new elevators or stairs, and the grounds would be easily accessible for the children.

Currently, most families in highrises are above the ground floor, which is typically used for storage, management, mainte-



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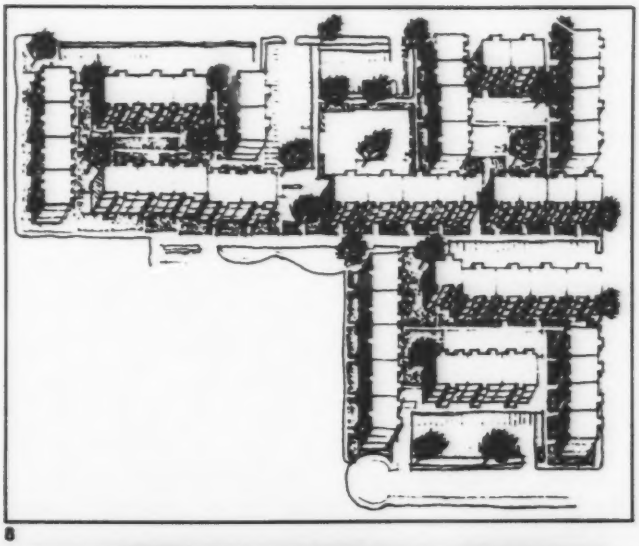

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7 Public housing project in New York has 3-storey buildings across the street from 12-storey highrises. Both house the same kind of families and are almost identical in overall size, density and population, but the crime, vandalism and turnover rates are three times higher in the highrise.

8 St. Francis Square has the same density as Pruitt-Igoe (36 units per acre), but the buildings were kept low and most of the grounds were assigned to specific families or family clusters.

9 Interior courts, St. Francis Square. The families on the second and third floors have balconies, those on the grounds have small gardens, and the middle court is a collective area, which the fifty families agree to maintain themselves. An example of low, moderate-income housing.

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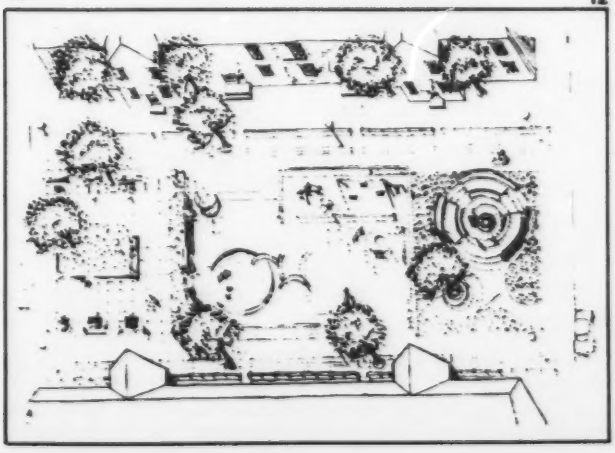

nance etc. The grounds surrounding the building are used for parking and are totally disassociated from the residents. This is an environment which belongs to no one, and yet it still must be cleaned, policed, and maintained. Locating families on the ground floor would alleviate these concerns. But take note: if the building is a mix of elderly and families with children, and most of the units are either 1-or 2-bedroom units with only a few 3-bedroom units, it wouldn't be cost efficient to subdivide the building. A better solution would be to subdivide the few 3-bedroom units and re-locate the larger families.

The first consideration, then, is numbers—keeping the number of families per entry to between 40 and 60. If that's not cost-feasible, the second consideration is family type. Large families should be as close to the ground floor as possible to allow for accessibility to the exterior and proper supervision, or grouped separately from small families, couples and singles in their own building.

The third consideration is the age and lifestyle of the family group. Large highrise complexes can work for a certain lifestyle group if it is dominant, and the environment is tailored to the group. The elderly are a good example. They're a gregarious group who want to strike up friendships and who are concerned about the welfare of others. They do not misuse equipment and take pride in looking after their surroundings. In a typical 150-unit highrise housing the elderly, it's not uncommon for every resident to know each other.

Post-war research of federal housing and urban development had recommended a mix for every highrise of 50% families and 50% elderly to recreate the extended family. But it didn't work for either group, what with conflicts over bicycles, quiet places to sit versus recreation areas, etc. What did result was the realization that an exclusive age group can fit a building type. Designers can then provide communal spaces for the lifestyle group so that the residents have a place to get to know one another and become a community.

Older people who have never lived in an apartment building find it difficult to accept the idea, but once they try it, they like it. It's a selling point if highrises for the elderly offer community services such as stores, laundry, health facilities, dining rooms, and meals on wheels.

The highrise is also workable for singles and working couples, especially if they have little time for grounds upkeep and enjoyment. These lifestyle groups may mix well with elderly residents. When upgrading or revitalizing an existing problem environment, therefore, look to changes of the lifestyle group or mix, which could be the least expensive and disruptive solution.

10 Clason Point Gardens, a public housing project in the Bronx, New York is a mix jof 400 2-storey row houses and walk-ups at a density of 24 units per acre.

11 Proposal was to break down the grounds by privatizing. Public spaces and rear yards were fenced off, front walks were defined by curbs, paths were widened and defined.

12 Proposal for the modification of the central square, designed for the use of three age groups: from the left, the 3 to 10-year olds, the elderly and teenagers.

A fourth consideration is the mixing of income groups (low, moderate, middle), keeping the low income residents to 25% to 30% of the total if possible. Such a mix would help to avoid the public housing stigma becoming attached to the building, and would prevent an attitude of neglect toward the residents by management and municipal services. As well, consider making the residents co-owners of the building, although the disposable income for mortgage payments, and maintenance may be limited. (Keeping the scale to 50 units in townhouses or walk-ups that look like surrounding single family houses will also go a long way in avoiding the public housing stigma.)

When designing a public housing project, it's important to consult prospective residents for their opinions and preferences. Give them the background information to make their choices. Our job is to influence people's activities by design, to encourage them to meet and get to know each other. Interracial relationships and a sense of belonging should be fostered in housing projects.

In a typical survey, tenants said they would prefer daycare, health clinics, and after-school activity rooms to recreational facilities like basketball courts and volleyball courts, which don't mix well with housing anyway. Tot lots do mix well as do small subdivided play areas, if they're located a reasonable distance away from the apartments and have only one piece of equipment for each block or cluster of units. Large central play areas with ten pieces of equipment can be disasterous and, in fact, housing projects with the largest recreation facilities had the highest crime rate.

Daycare centres are the most important investments one can make in public housing. Single mothers are given mobility to go to school or to work, and couples can benefit by the extra income to get out of public housing.

When designing parking, relate it to the street and to the entrance of the buildings. Many projects have their lobbies oriented to the building's good side and the parking entrances are accessible only via narrow back hallways near the garbage room. The front entries have all the security and are not nearly as used as the back entries, which have no security.

Obviously, it's easier to physically modify existing walk-ups and townhouses than existing highrises. Although back-to-back townhouses are not highly thought of, they're good family housing units with an appropriate density for family housing, and should be upgraded if possible rather than torn down. Often, a good painting, re-working of the grounds, and improvements in circulation for traffic, parking and garbage pick-up are all that need to be done to make the project attractive and workable.

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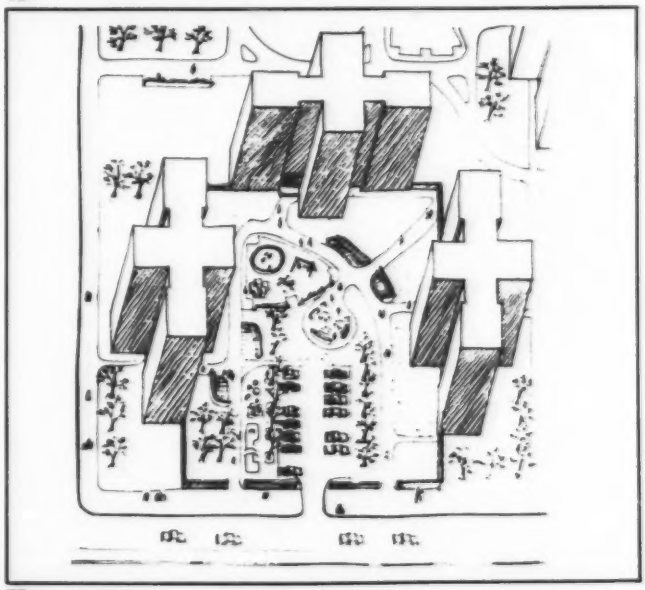

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13 Rear yards have been created with 6-foot high cast iron fences and are now accessible from the units only. Within a year, residents had added their own plants, fences and furniture. Budget for modifications was $3,000 per unit.

14 The aim at the Bronxdale neighbourhood was to subdivide the 6-storey towers into clusters with internal parking and introduce electronic surveillance for monitoring of entrances, circulation routes and play areas. Typical clusters are shown.

Oscar Newman is a well-known architect, planner and author of "Defensible Space," "Community of Interest," "Design Guidelines for Creating Defensible Space," and "Instability in Assisted Housing."

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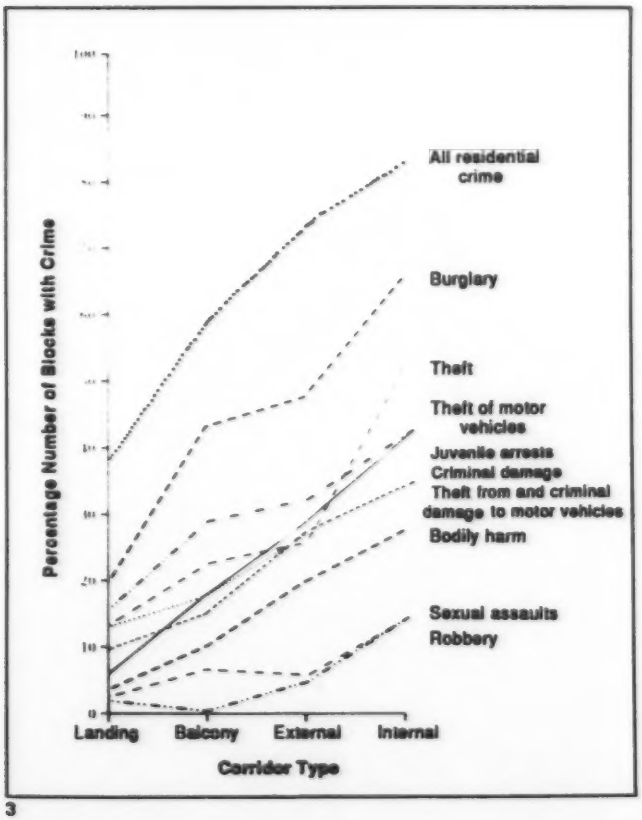

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Alice Coleman

My interest in housing design was stimulated by the work of Jane Jacobs, focussed by the work of Oscar Newman, and goaded into action by Britain's Department of the Environment, which is responsible for all housing design in Britain. General thinking by the government was that all problems in the housing industry were the result of problem people, problem children and problem local authorities.

After reading Newman's "Defensible Space," it became clear to me that the question of how housing design influences or contributes to the rate of crime and other social problems should be explored. If it was indeed true that bad building design and crime were related, it was easier, we reasoned, to change buildings than to change people. In our research, we studied various public housing projects in a 50-square kilometre area and the relative crime figures. We identified sixteen variables that commonly showed up in the designs and charted how they affected the behaviour of the residents. The sixteen were divided into four groups: size (dwellings per block, dwellings per entrance, storeys per block, storeys per dwelling), circulation (overhead walkways, interconnected exits, vertical routes, dwellings per corridor), entrance (position, type, stilts or garages on ground floor, doors or holes), and features of the grounds (blocks per site, gates or gaps from street, play areas, spatial organization). We compared these statistics to the rates of crime and building abuse, including graffiti, vandalism, littering, burglary, assaults and so on.

A threshold value of each variable was established, that is, the maximum or ideal frequency that that variable could occur in a building before it contributed to negative behaviour either in those who lived there or others. If it exceeded the maximum frequency, then the building could be considered at a "design disadvantage." Every time a variable exceeded the ideal, it received a demerit point or a disadvantage mark. A score of design disadvantagement could then be calculated.

We found, for example, that 12 dwellings per block is the ideal number. The threshold value, therefore, is 12. The threshold value for the number of dwellings per entrance is 6, the threshold value for the number of dwellings per corridor is 4 and that for the number of storeys per dwelling, 3. (In Britain, many apartments are more than one storey.) Ideally, there should only be one staircase per block, one non-interconnected exit and no overhead walkways.

One conclusion seemed inescapable: bad design makes the

1 Side entrances are notoriously poorly designed, and are often just gaps in the building. They're usually covered with graffiti and refuse.

2 Gloucester Grove Estates. Overhead walkways make it easy for criminals to escape. Its graffiti-laden internal corridors link 916 dwellings via round service towers containing elevators, stairs and garbage chutes.

3 Graph shows that 38% of the blocks with external corridors have crime, but only 18% of the blocks with internal corridors have crime.

task of socializing children a difficult one. Children growing up in an anonymous highrise don't cultivate a sense of self confidence and independence nor do they learn to respect private property. Crimes of abuse and even of violence stem from this. Different building design can, for example, determine the likelihood of crimes like arson. In two estates that we studied—one with a very high disadvantagement score, the other with a very low one—the first had one fire per five dwellings per year while the second had one fire per 810 dwellings per year. The incidence of juvenile arrest (arrests for crimes away from the block) was much greater where the disadvantagement scores were higher. When the juveniles were moved into better blocks, they behaved better and committed less crime.

Because bigger buildings naturally have higher disadvantagement scores, we charted the average size of building versus the disadvantagement scores. We found that fewer crimes are committed as the size of the block decreases. It seems that after 5 storeys, crime went up considerably.

One problem we frequently encountered, one particular to Britain, was the interlinking of buildings by overhead walkways. As many as 80 apartment blocks can be joined together, providing easy escape routes for criminals. In Gloucester Grove Estates, the graffiti-laden internal corridors link 916 dwellings via round service towers containing elevators, stairs and garbage chutes. These towers multiply the fire risk as children commonly ignite the contents of the garbage rooms.

The following are more of our findings:

- With increasing size, there's generally a decrease in litter-free blocks and an increase in those with graffiti both inside and outside the building.
- Landings and balconies (external landings) with up to 4 dwellings are less abused with litter, feces and urine than long external corridors or the combined class of internal and intermediate corridors. Surprisingly, internal landings proved generally to be better than balconies.
- Thiry-eight per cent of the buildings studied that had external corridors experienced high rates of crime while only 18% with internal corridors had the crime problems.
- Walk-ways are the worst for spreading crime from block to block. Those buildings with 4 or more walkways experienced 100% more crime than those with no walkways. When they were removed, the crime rate, especially the burglary rate, dropped dramatically. Aylesbury Estate, in which 2,268 units are joined by walkways, is notorious for its social problems. Management wanted to cut the block in two, so that there would be two

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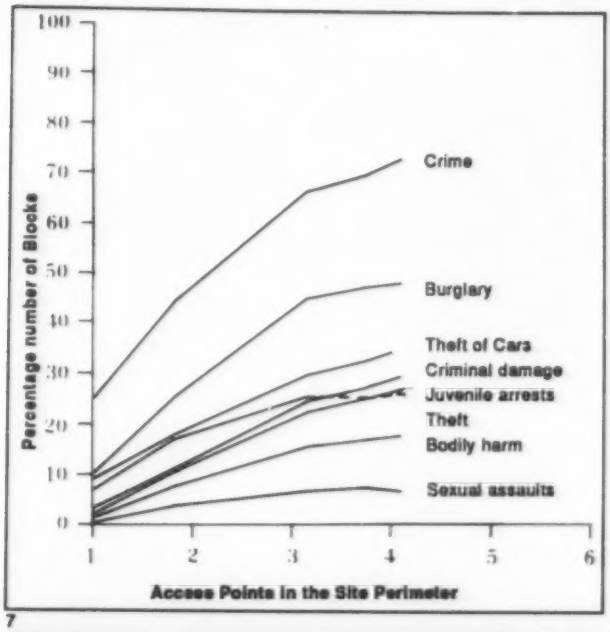
4 Overhead walkways influence the spread of crime more than any other factor. They can link as many as 80 estate blocks. When an estate has more than 4 walkways, the crime rate increases dramatically.

5 Spatial organization most influences the volume of crime. If this shared open space was divided into individual gardens for ground-floor tenants, its use would be maximized, its maintenance would be ensured, and its crime reduced.

6 This 508-unit complex in Liverpool had 2,700 design defects. By replacing paths with roads, removing the alleys, providing a front or back garden for each unit, and creating a back to back unit configuration, 1,248 of the defects were eliminated.



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self-contained sections, but the fire service objected. In Westminster Estate, the corridors were shortened, resulting in fewer units per hall and per entrance, and subsequently litter and graffiti have decreased, bringing, in turn, a substantial drop in maintenance costs.

- Spatial organization is the greatest determinant of the volume of crime. Landscape architects assumed that grounds shared between apartment blocks maximized their use, but no one, other than criminals hiding in the bushes, ended up using them. If a shared area were to be divided between the buildings and then divided into individual gardens for ground floor flats, they would be available for family use. Such a set-up would be instrumental in the socialization of children. Toddlers must learn self-confidence, and enclosed gardens, where children are safe but can still explore without constant supervision, are conducive to this. Studies have shown that without this outlet in which they can experience independence, children can become emotionally crippled. When they get older, they tend to stay around the estate, releasing their energies by getting into trouble.
- Play areas, generally disliked by both tenants and property managers, experience lots of problems, noise and vandalism being the worst. Crime rises in estates that have play areas. When some estates converted the areas into individual gardens, the crime was reduced.
- One access point into the estate is a better safeguard against abuse than several. The more entrances, the more crime. One solution would be to divide the estate into several blocks, each having a direct entrance from the street. If one wanted to go to the next block, he or she would have no choice but to walk along the public street to get there. This would mean a greater public presence on the street, better surveillance, and generally a greater degree of safety.
- Three-storey walk-ups with few units per entrance have minimal disadvantagement scores as do semi-detached houses converted to flats. The latter, denigrated by planners in the past, are a favoured housing alternative. They have private back yards, front fences and gates, which keep children from wandering onto private property. Each home has an identity, and the neighbourhood often has a mixture of age groups. Children brought up in such environments have respect for private property and tend not to grow up to be vandalistic. They see older people taking care of their homes, and will likely emulate this when they get their own homes, setting an example in turn for their children. On the other hand, children growing up

7 Graph indicates that the more entrances into the site, the more crime. Each building should have its own entrance from the street.

8 Surveillance of the street in these units is poor. Gardens should be a minimum of 3 metres deep for proper surveillance.

9 Although they're popular, additions such as these new enclosed entrances may serve only to worsen the situation. They reduce surveillance, and considering that they're easily vandalized and will look badly in a short time, their cost is not justified.

in high-rise apartments, where they're segregated from older residents, are deprived of this example. As well, it's easy for a subculture to develop if children associate with their peers only.

- It's important to design units with surveillance opportunities in mind. Porches should be visible from the windows to enable detection of intruders. Garden depth should be a minimum of 3 metres. Too many trees can spoil the sightlines. Alleged security improvements—locks, entry phones, spy holes, barbed wire etc.—do not always work well. It's better to install strong doors on individual apartments rather than one on the communal entrance. High walls along the streets don't make security better for passersby because they afford no escape from muggers.
- Private ownership upgrades the neighbourhood; people take care of their own possessions. One million out of five million council houses in Britain have been sold to private owners and their upkeep has improved immeasurably. Co-operatives can be formed in estates.

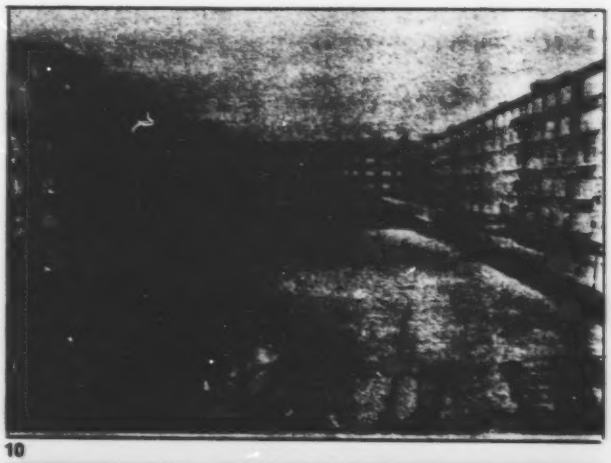
A Case Study

Leaveview Estate in London Hackney, built in the 1930s, consists of two blocks, each having three wings. It was plagued with vandalism, burglaries, noise, etc. A similar estate, with the same problems, is located nearby. An architect was commissioned to improve conditions in each estate, both with 6 million pounds at his disposal. The architect in the neighbouring estate had all the kitchens and bathrooms refurbished, new elevators installed, grounds re-landscaped and the building painted. He didn't address the real problems, however, and within a short time, the litter and graffiti returned and the crime rate was back to one crime per dwelling per year.

In Leaveview Estates, the architect created 2-storey maisonettes from the units on the ground and second floors, and gave them their own gardens. New front doors lent each maisonette its own identity and status. New elevators for the units on the upper three floors were linked to the building with glass corridors, offering surveillance opportunities to those residents.

The front gardens seemed to change the behaviour of the children, largely because they no longer had feelings of anonymity. Neighbours watched for litter. The neighbouring park became much safer and useable. And as it was renovated, each wing became crime-free. The estate's disadvantagement score dropped from 10 to 2.

Alice Coleman is a professor of geography at King's College, London, and is the author of "Utopia on Trial, Vision and Reality in Planned Housing."



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10 Leaveview Estate, built in the 1930s, had one crime per dwelling per year.

11 The architect's proposal for Leaveview Estate. Each ground-floor unit has 2 storeys, a garden and a front door. As it was renovated, each wing of the estate became crime-free.

12 Six to 8 units share each elevator. The glass corridors leading to the elevators offer a degree of security and provide surveillance. They're often decorated with plants by the residents.

Oscar Newman

It's interesting to note that all the estates that Alice Coleman showed, including the highrises, were built at a density of 35 units to the acre, the same density as the original back-to-back, 3-storey townhouses that they replaced. A very low density by North American standards.

In order of preference, Alice says semi-detached units work best, followed by 2-storey and 3-storey townhouses. Now, semi-detached housing is built at a density of 10 to 12 units per acre, 2-storey townhouses at 16 to 18, and if pushed, 3-storey townhouses at 24 units per acre, though at this point, parking becomes a problem. I find that although the recommended parking ratio is 1.25 cars per unit, you can get away with one car per unit, even .6 car per unit if good mass transit is available. This way, underground parking won't be necessary and you get away with a higher-density building.

My point is that, although these housing types are preferable, many projects will call for densities that preclude anything but highrises. Although Alice disagrees with segregating the elderly and families, keeping them together in housing of more than 35 units per acre is courting disaster. Best to house the elderly and singles in highrises and place the families at the lower densities.

Antonio Di Mambro

It's important that we observe and listen to the users of the environment. Public housing poses very different conditions than private housing, and as Alice pointed out, causes of the problems common to public housing are more complicated than just physical issues. Ideas need to evolve. Your first ideas can always be improved upon.

John Sewell

The contribution of Alice Coleman's book is that it provides scientifically tested, quantifiable measures that any building can be judged against. I'm disturbed at the suggestion that conclusions are being drawn about social behaviour and design with little supporting evidence.

I disagree with Mr. Di Mambro that public housing is different from other housing types. The only difference is that public housing doesn't have any market forces playing upon it, and therefore designers can get away with bad design that the paying public wouldn't put up with.

Oscar Newman

I would like to respond to Mr. Sewell's comments. First, we actually did a study on child behaviour as it was affected by the environment to test theories of crime development. Without going into the details of the study, we found that there is indeed a strong co-relation between the socialization of the child in its environment and the development of crime.

As for Mr. Sewell's second point, we found that if all the housing authorities in the country were to close down, public housing were abolished, and tenants were given a rent subsidy and told to find private housing instead, it would cost the taxpayer 2 ½ to 3 times less than the present system. Unfortunately, the danger is that the government can cut the subsidy at any time and jeopardize the security of thousands. Public housing projects are more permanent.

Antonio Di Mambro

Like every North American city, Boston has good and bad neighbourhoods. Built after World War II, Jefferson Park is a bad neighbourhood, although when it was newly completed, it was hailed as the model community. The 200-unit development is located next to the city dumps, a major transportation centre, a residential neighbourhood, and a railroad, on the other side of which is a shopping centre. At one time, Jefferson Park had many play areas, but they were eventually paved over in what is now a "sea of asphalt." Although 2,000 people are waiting for an apartment in Jefferson Park, the development is only 30% occupied. The rest of the development is unliveable.

Redevelopment of the neighbourhood was done with a "turnkey" approach. For a year and a half, housing authorities and a tenant task force met to discuss problems in the community. The tenants complained of the institutional character of the buildings, the small-sized apartments (a 3-bedroom unit was 850 square feet), abuse of the common hallways, unrestricted access to the roofs, and the incineration of trash. On the site, they disliked the lack of private or semi-private spaces, the scattered services, the vacant, abandoned buildings, and the poor circulation and parking distribution. Also troublesome was the poor entrance/exit system, the isolation from surrounding neighbourhood facilities, the severely deteriorated site and excessive open space.

Having discussed various solutions, the group secured $15 million in funds from both the state and the federal governments and then called a designer/developer competition. Our firm emerged as winner.

We approached the midrise buildings with the following goals:

- make the lobbies and collective facilities visible from the street;
- enlarge the units;
- modernize the trash collection;
- create a new single entrance;
- substantially rehabilitate the building.

In the lowrise buildings, our aims were:

- improve the residential character of the buildings;
- give each unit a private entry and trash storage;
- separate units by density;
- enlarge the units;
- eliminate common hallways and roof access;
- utilize ground floor area;
- give a private back yard for each unit;
- install new heating and hot water systems.

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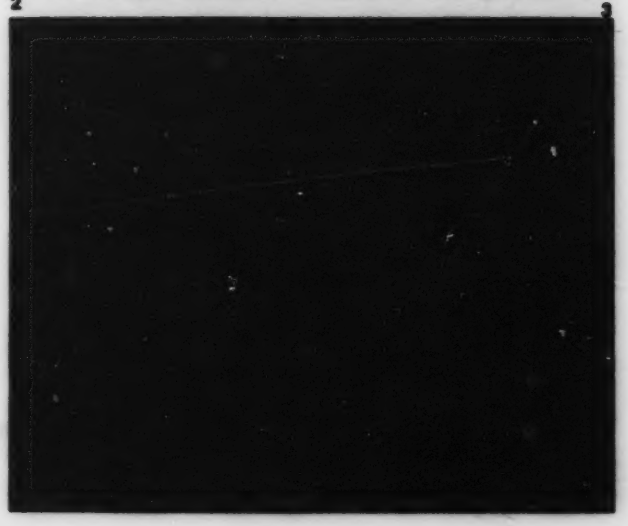

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1 Jefferson Park: despite its run-down condition, the waiting list for tenancy is 2,000.

2 The site, a "sea of asphalt," provided few private or semi-private spaces.

3 The entrances have been redefined. Scissor stairs were eliminated in the walk-ups. Stairs in the low-rise buildings, used by 12 to 16 units, now serve fewer apartments as densities are decreased.

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Overall, we wanted to change the physical image of the project, improve the connections to the surrounding area, provide new facilities for day care, health care, after school programs, laundry, and management. We would be redesigning 200 substandard flats into 175 units as flats, duplexes and triplexes. The cost of our program would be $15 million, or $65,000 per unit.

As for the site, we wanted to assign a definite function for each space within the project and associate with each building a semi-public space with uses appropriate to the unit mix. The street system needed to be simplified, and the car and pedestrian systems needed to be clearly related. New pedestrian links to the neighbourhood facilities, which were to be consolidated in one building, needed to be established. We wanted to reorganize the parking into small bays, which would be clearly visible from the units. A new exit/entry into the site would be created and overall, the site would be enhanced with landscaping.

We tried to use existing housing to best advantage. In the 3-bedroom apartments, for example, we brought the basements, which are only about three feet below ground, into use, extending the units by 450 square feet. Units were given front door access from the site.

Columbia Point

Originally designed as an homage to Le Corbusier, the second project, the 1,500-unit Columbia Point, became so dilapidated, only 350 units could be occupied. For a decade, architects tried to correct its long list of ills. Finally, the residents grew so frustrated, they took the matter largely into their own hands. They became partners with the city's housing authorities and together they decided that Columbia Point needed complete rehabilitation. Several questions had to be asked before the redevelopment could be contemplated: how is the market locally? How much is enough? Who is the housing for—permanent residents, transitional tenants, or both? How much money is available? Would the changes reduce vandalism and crime? Should we restore or demolish? They had to realize that physical design is only one component of community building.

In a process that would eventually take three years and include experts from many fields, they worked out a list of aims, which included:

- making the tenant association a general partner of the development team;

4 The organization of the court was reversed, with cars, the management building and green spaces—previously concrete basketball courts—in the middle. Each L-shaped building now has a semi-public court, with a tot lot for 16 families. A new entrance into the site aligns with Jackson Street and a pedestrian path runs through the site to connect it with the adjacent neighbourhood.

5 With its pitched roof, the community facilities building has a town hall image. It sits on the edge of the development so it can be shared with the adjacent neighbourhood.

6 Resulting buildings: private and public spaces, parking, entrances and play areas are clearly defined.

- changing the physical and social image of the project;
- improving connections to surrounding neighbourhoods and waterfront;
- upgrading and diversifying units;
- reducing density: 1,500 to 1,280;
- programming a racial and income mix amongst residents;
- providing adequate elderly and social services;
- providing employment for low-income residents.

The group first secured large amounts of funds from the municipal, state and federal governments as well as private monies from people looking for tax shelters. With a firm of lawyers and my firm as consultants, they called a designer/builder/developer competition with the understanding that the winning developer would join the tenant association in a new corporation. Bound by a memorandum of understanding, this corporation would oversee design and construction as well as management of the project after it was completed. Because Columbia Point would be open to everyone as part of the subsidization plan, the tenants wanted to secure their rights before any land was leased or sold.

The cost of the program was estimated at $190 million, or $130,000 per unit. The developers received $140 million in low interest loans. The aim is for the project to pay for itself, and in the present context of a booming economy and a shortage of housing, we feel it will. The wealthy subsidize the poor, so that of the units to be sold, the more expensive ones will subsidize the cheaper ones.

Although the 50-acre development sits on what was originally a city dump, it does enjoy spectacular views of the harbour and downtown Boston. To enhance these views, several buildings would be demolished. A major boulevard would be established, from which primary, secondary and tertiary streets would run, with parking to match. No parking was allowed along the boulevard.

New blocks of sensible design, offering 73 different apartment types, were built, and these, as well as the remaining existing blocks, have front and back yards with tot lots. Each block also has a neighbourhood green, to be shared by 30 to 40 families.

In the existing lowrise buildings, there were few apartment choices, and in all cases, the apartments were small and poorly laid out. The stairways were used by too many families, and the lobbies were small, dangerous and frequented by outsiders. The buildings themselves were institutional in character and had no yards or landscaped outdoor spaces around them. We proposed to give the buildings a residential look with individual entries and porches, pitched roofs and bay windows. Inside, the stairs and lobbies are used only by the tenants on the top floors; those on the ground floors were given individual entries as well as their own yard. Residents were given a choice of triplexes, duplexes and flats.

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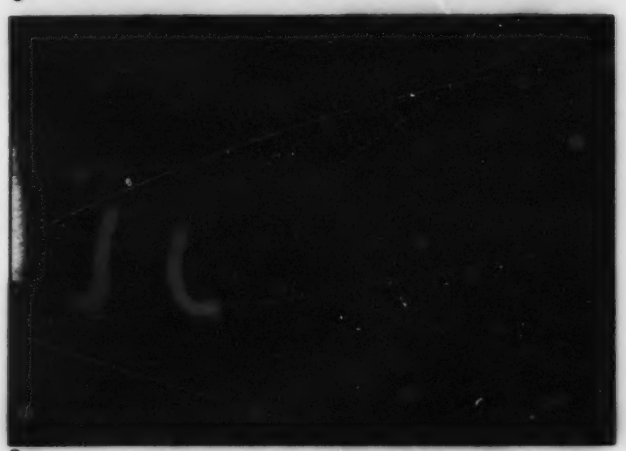

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7 New street and pedestrian system link the development to surrounding neighbourhoods. New community services building is at left.

8 The site of Columbia Point has a spectacular view of Boston.

9 Existing conditions were pretty grim.

DI MAMBRO

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Elderly residents were given the choice of a 1-or 2-bedroom apartment in their own 89-unit complex, which was oufitted with bay windows and rebricked. The complex consists of two midrise buildings in a back-to-back arrangement, which allows the two to share a courtyard. Located along the neighbourhood mall, the midrise facing the mall has stores and other conveniences on its ground level. As well, a new 1-storey structure linking the two buildings will house community and shared spaces for the elderly.

In the 5 or 6 variations of new townhouses, every unit has direct entry from the sidewalk, a front and back yard, and a parking spot in front, so that one's car is always in view. There's an enclosed storage space in the back yard, and a tot lot in the back area so that parents can supervise their children while remaining indoors. Inside, the living and dining rooms can be either at the front or back of the house. A laundry hook-up is available in each unit. The distribution of the unit types was decided according to the needs of the future tenants. The larger units with 5 to 6 bedrooms, for example, are usually for families with children and are therefore on the ground floor for direct access to the yards and play areas.

The new 5-to 7-storey midrises, located along the street across from the community mall and large park, have landscaped parking lots behind the building, visible from each unit. With a choice of 1-or 2-bedroom apartments, residents can live either in the ground-floor units, which have direct access to the street, back yards and laundry hook-ups, or on the upper levels, which offer laundry rooms on each floor.

The community facilities, previously located along Mt. Vernon Street at the edge of the development, were poorly situated and suffered from a lack of identity. Because they were so poorly organized and maintained, they were underutilized. In the re-design, we put the centre along the public mall at 4 locations, each having its own identity.

Antonio Di Mambro, principal of a Boston-based architectural and planning firm, has extensive experience in the design of public housing projects.

10 Each block has a front and back yard and a neighbourhood green.

11 New midrise apartment buildings along the mall and primary streets recall the formal architecture of Boston. Di Mambro wanted stores all along the mall, but the residents objected. A compromise was struck whereby a limited number of stores of 10,000 square feet would be built, with future extensions possible. Parking is at the back.

12 Nearly completed townhouses.

Rem Koolhaas

Up until this century, growth in Amsterdam occurred in uniform circles, adding on to the small round area that was the city's medieval core. The 20th century brought such tremendous growth to the city that the traditional growth patterns were abandoned in favour of growth spurts in finger-like extensions. Bijlmermeer, a huge housing development built in the 1960s and 70s, sits on one of these fingers. At a scale never before realized, the project is the largest of its kind in the world, covering the same land area as the city of Amsterdam itself.

The project was first conceived of in the early 30s, based on the principles of architecture and urbanism of Le Corbusier. There is a North American feeling of spaciousness to the project, a lack of oppressiveness, a breaking away from tradition, and a strong emphasis on mobility and freedom. By the time the first buildings were completed in 1968, a generation after the first spark of their inception, a shift of values and ideology characterized society. The project, set in what was supposed to be an idyllic site with large parks and waterways, removed from the city yet connected to it by an elevated highway, subway and railway, came in for a lot of criticism from architects, politicians, etc. The 400-metre long, 11-storey apartment buildings arranged in a relentless hexagonal pattern became universally despised.

Much of the dislike was fuelled by a series of socialist governments in Amsterdam. Admittedly, there were a lot of social problems at Bijlmermeer. Many of the tenants were new to the country, part of a huge wave of immigration that occurred when the last Dutch colony gained independence. But the tenants didn't seem to have complaints about the Bijlmermeer itself. The apartments were large and well-made and the site boasted large bodies of water and green spaces.

Still, by the late 70s, with Modernism having gone out of style, architects were commissioned to undo the "mistakes" of Bijlmermeer. They reverted back to traditional city planning schemes, building low-rises and townhouses around the original core of Bijlmermeer. Further attempts were made in the early 80s to humanize the concrete monoliths by painting the facades and adding clock towers and colourful entrances. These tactics only compounded the problems because they didn't build on the project's strengths or address its weaknesses.

The dislike of Bijlmermeer grew to such a pitch that the civil service talked of having the highrises demolished, despite the horrendous cost involved. As a last resort, my firm was asked to spend a 3-week period to look at Bijlmermeer, to see if we could come up with any solutions. The following was our

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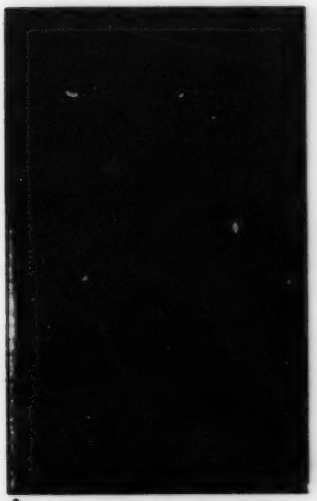
1 The largest project of its kind in the world, Bijlmermeer comprises dozens of 11-storey hexagonal apartment blocks that house thousands of families.

2 Parking garage: a North American feeling of spaciousness can be experienced.

3 Just to preserve the geometry, an enormous bridge ends at an empty hexagonal island.

KOOLHAAS



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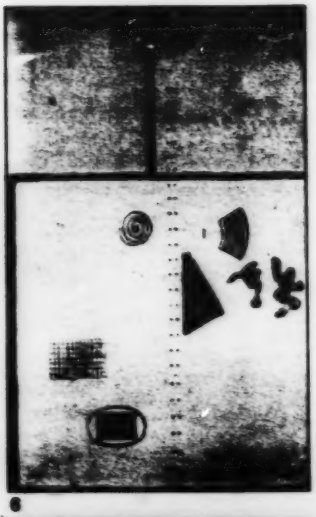

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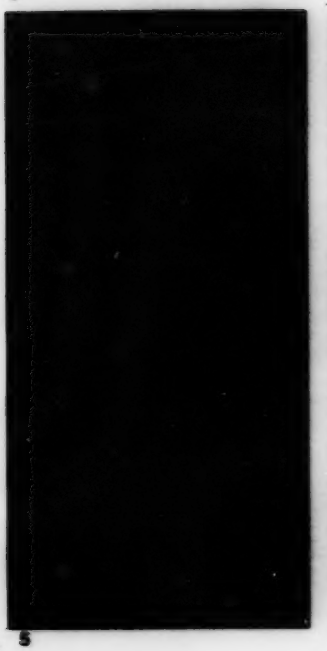

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presentation to the press and government.

The purpose of our redesign was to preserve the original Modernistic beauty of the scheme, its qualities of monotony and abstraction. We did, however, recognize the relentless single-mindedness of the language. The water elements that run through the site, the playgrounds and even the playground equipment were in the same hexagonal shape. Just to preserve the geometry, an enormous bridge had been built to a small empty hexagonal island. The roughness and lack of detail of the buildings invited vandalism. Generally, there's a poverty of visual experience because everything is boring and homogeneous.

We strove to minimize our interference and destruction while at the same time increasing the density and variety of the development. We took one sector of Bijlmermeer to test our architectural theories and methods.

Our first step, however, was to dispell the negativism of the general population toward the development. Because the impression most Dutchmen have of Bijlmermeer is gained as they drive along the highway, we dealt with this first. The highway sits above ground on concrete bunkers. Lining the highway on each side at ground level are boulevards of parking garages. While travelling along the highway, motorists see only the rooftops of the garages and the views of the green spaces of Bijlmermeer are obstructed. We proposed to remove some of the parking garages and add some pavilions, rest stops, and parkettes, so that travellers could stop and see what Bijlmermeer is really like. Storage areas have been made under the road, and created in place of the removed garages is an open-air plaza with commercial facilities. The other garages could be gradually thinned out, allowing for a new layer of construction of housing and towers.

On a separate level from the highway, the "Metro" also runs through Bijlmermeer. With its Egyptian grandeur, the railway was an element whose potential was never realized. We saw an opportunity here for an adjacent, partially covered boulevard that would connect the elements of Bijlmermeer. Stores and other commercial activities could be gradually added, building up the density.

We felt there was nothing essentially wrong with the hexagonal housing blocks, so we proposed little change to them. The ground plane, however, on which they were organized, suffered from lifelessness and monotony. Interventions on this level would be intense. Three new boulevards break up the tract of land, bringing the car to the ground. The apartment buildings are thus linked together and given new legitimate entrances. In time, we would like to see weekend houses, boardwalks, commercial activities lining the boulevards.

4 The architecture was being blamed for conditions that are more subtle and invisible.

5 Garages will extend from the main thoroughfare, which in time could see the development of housing and commercial facilities.

6 Every courtyard was given a different feature—an amphitheatre, playing field, lake—to create a variety of experiences.

7 The plan was received favourably from the press and government officials.

Courtyards to the hexagons were also devoid of any interest. We suggested that each courtyard be given a different quality and theme to create a variety of visual experiences. One could be an open-air theatre, another a playing field, etc.

We redesigned the landscaping. The weakness of the existing landscaping was that it was neither forest nor park. We made distinctions between the two by concentrating trees in some areas in forest-like conditions and clearing them in others for activities. As well, we designed new direct pedestrian walkways through the green spaces, again linking the buildings more efficiently.

Our plan was so favourably received by both press and government officials that we were asked to prepare a proposal for the whole development. Bijlmermeer has since been granted independence of Amsterdam and is now a city in its own right. With this in mind, we suggested that new building typologies be developed that would celebrate freedom and declare Bijlmermeer as explicitly Modern. We would like to see the boulevard along the highway gradually cleared of garages and built up with higher-density structures. A platform would allow access to it from both the ground and the highway. An intersecting highway would also be developed with individual free-standing buildings that would express the aesthetic of free enterprise. The road system and the landscaping principles previously discussed would be extended to the whole of Bijlmermeer. A large park (which is not really utilized, considering all the parkland in the development) would be built up with villas.

Rem Koolhaas is architect of the winning design for the housing competition for Roosevelt Island, New York. He published his manifesto, "Delirious Manifesto" in 1978.

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8 A planning proposal for the whole of Bijlmermeer was commissioned by the government.

9 The scheme was devised along the main spine, which was accessible from both the ground and the highway. The aesthetic of free enterprise is expressed by the free-standing buildings.

10 Along the second intersecting highway, individual buildings for residual sites are planned.

Oscar Newman

Mr. Koolhaas has recognized and salvaged the spirit of the original scheme and what he proposes shows a heroic effort. However, throughout the presentation, he talks of form and aesthetics and geometries, but makes no mention of the 15,000 families trapped in Bijlmermeer, their behaviour, their lifestyle, or their needs. His solutions are aimed at softening the visual qualities of the project, how new geometries will modify old ones, not considering that the old forms were never conducive to good living conditions in the first place. The question he should be asking is, how can we modify forms to enhance living conditions?

The problem with the Bijlmermeer is not the bad publicity, but the bad environment. This scheme would not improve the quality of life for the tenants one iota.

Alice Coleman

I agree with Mr. Koolhaas that it's a good idea to make use of the roads and the adjacent spaces, but I wonder whether housing, placed along the highways, will be too open and vulnerable.

The main problem here is the buildings and how people live in them. I understand that the Bijlmermeer is the drug capital of Holland and that it suffers from a very high rate of crime and burglary. I also know that the buildings have scored 12 on the disadvantagement scale. None have enclosures indicating private areas nor are any of the ground floors used for anything but storage and walkways. The best thing that's been done in the past is the partitioning of the corridors, which, ugly though they are, have helped to limit the number of units per hallway.

Mr. Koolhaas's proposal to thicken forested areas will no doubt contribute to the incidence of muggings and rapes.

Antonio Di Mambro

Bijlmermeer and Columbia Point are similar in that they want to salvage what is there. I wanted to introduce an attitude of regional, contextual urbanism and architecture; Mr. Koolhaas took a dramatic turn by looking to the United States for cues rather than to Amsterdam. There is nothing wrong in being Modern. The question is, should we homogenize everything, or should we give place to unique solutions that have local flavour. Perhaps when in Rome, one should feel that the project also is in Rome, or Toronto, or Boston. Above all, we must be contemporary and understand what people like to do and how they want to live. You need to go to them to find out.

Edgeley Village, Alan Littlewood

Edgeley Village is located in a notorious, "problem area" of Toronto. The privately-run development is divided into north, middle and south sections of 2-storey detached units, organized around courts. (A high-rise building also sits on the site, but only its ground floor was to be included in the redevelopment scheme.) Parking is in centrally located lots, away from the units, but attached to them by walkways. A fair amount of parkland surrounds the complex, and city streets do not run through it. Entrances are marked by low archways.

The poor design and layout of the development has caused frustrating problems for the residents. Taxis can't get to their doors because there's no vehicle access, a particular problem for disabled tenants. Even more serious is the lack of access for ambulances and fire trucks. Lives were lost a few years ago when firefighters couldn't get their trucks under the archways.

Public transit doesn't run through Edgeley, a problem for residents who can't afford cars. For those who can, parking is so distanced from the units, that cars are regularly vandalized. Thirty per cent of cars here are broken down and abandoned, and being on private property, they're not towed away, but are left for the housing authority to remove. Tenants commonly drive their cars through the park after shopping to drop off their parcels at their doors before returning their cars to the lots.

The main parking pad sits in the centre of the development, marking the end of the public street and also of servicing by the municipality. This means most of the services, their installation and maintenance, are the responsibility of the housing authority. Unfortunately, the result has been backed-up sewers and brown water, power failures, and garbage containers that are placed at considerable distances from the units for the convenience of the collectors. The nearest shopping centre, characterized by aggressive-looking litter cans and wire mesh coverings over windows, is inconveniently located for quick shopping.

The isolation of the development and proximity to ravines have aided in an already serious crime problem, especially the drug trade. Because the police can't drive through Edgeley,

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1 A model of the Edgeley development. Driftwood Avenue is at the bottom of the development. In the centre, a parking pad signals the end of the public street and the end of municipal services.

2 The middle section of the development. Note the central parking connected to the units by walkways. The archway in the centre of the picture signals the entrance to the development, but is impassable to fire trucks.

3 A typical Edgeley unit entrance. The court in front of the unit is neither private nor public.

EDGELEY VILLAGE

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patrolling the development is difficult. Offenders make drug deals in the courtyards (intended as children's play areas) and then disappear through an alleyway to the ravine should they be warned of nearby police. The police are unsure of their rights in Edgeley, not knowing whether they are on public or private property.

In fact, there is a blurring between public and private even for the residents. Courts in front of the units are neither public nor private. Backyards in Edgeley, though they are defined by chainlink fences, provide little privacy. Because the front yards have no definition between one neighbour and another, nobody takes care of them.

The architects believed a lot of these problems would be solved by connecting Edgeley to the city. A new north-south road joining Edgeley to major city streets and the neighbourhoods on the north and south will allow for a much-needed bus route. Then, by using the space between buildings and removing about forty units, a new interior street system could be created. The backs of the units would become the fronts and vice versa, providing road access via streets or laneways, and parking and private space for every unit. Some new, narrower units and larger, 3-storey units of better design would be added where "holes" were created between buildings. These could be sold, used as co-ops or as more public housing. Larger "holes" would be filled with new educational and health care facilities.

The large central park will be the site of two new 6-storey apartment buildings, which will increase the density and help to pay for the development. These buildings will be located on the bus route and will feature shops on the ground floors.

The cost of the new roads and lanes, municipal services, few hundred trees, rear yard fences would be about $3 million. From the existing 298 units (including a bordering highrise), forty were lost for roadways and improvements, but the new highrises added another 264, bringing the total to 520 units, almost doubling Edgeley's population. Selling 256 lots at about $12,000 to $15,000 per unit would generate the $3 million needed for the changes.

The proposal was favourably received by the residents, local politicians, school board, surrounding neighbours and police, who believed it would clean up the drug problem.

Alan Littlewood is an architect and planner and principal in the Toronto firm of Littlewood Hesse Architects.

4 An attractive courtyard, which was intended for children's play, is used instead for drug dealing. Through an alleyway in the corner the offenders escape police.

5 The chainlink fences in the Edgeley back yards provide little privacy.

6 Front yards have no clear distinction between each other, so neither neighbour claims responsibility for maintenance.

EDGELEY VILLAGE

Oscar Newman

There seems to be a lack of consistency in what is being advocated here, as if the architects are still in the exploratory stages of the project. Front vs. rear, public vs. private, parking, lanes, community focus must all still be worked out. Having said that, I acknowledge how difficult it is to superimpose rhyme and reason after the fact on an existing chaotic and inconsistent design. I recommend more research to find a good solution to this problem, although I'm not sure if that's even possible. I do question the introduction of the 6-storey buildings with inadequate parking when there's a parking problem already.

Alice Coleman

An interesting scheme, which will improve the neighbourhood. My first reaction is to question the wisdom of front and back roads for the units. My experience from England shows that this encourages more crime by providing more escape routes. I recommend replacing the large roads at the back of the units with paths and enlarging the backyards. The frontyards could be enlarged as well. Avoid dead ends!

Rather than the two 6-storey buildings, I recommend that more housing be added. The shops that were to be on the buildings' ground floors could be mixed on ' t street. (Stores in apartment buildings only encourage vandalism anyway.) Instead of demolishing the entrance archways (and the units above them), fill the archways in to enlarge adjacent units.

Antonio Di Mambro

On the issue of rental versus ownership of units, I see the potential for conflicts, grounds maintenance, for example. Strong management would be needed to handle problems.

Eliminating the road along the back of the units in favour of an alley or pathway could bring new problems such as snow and garbage removal.

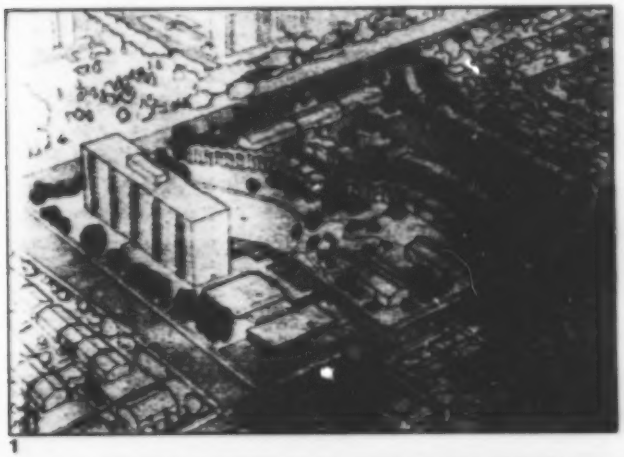
The main design features to be emphasized here are a strongly pronounced front entrance, a clear back yard environment and accessible parking (front being preferred over rear as the latter involves reorganizing the units' ground floor layout). Equally important as the new street system is the improvement of existing housing stock. New paint, pitched roofs, new windows and doors would make the units less institutional and more residential looking. At the moment, they do have that "public housing" look. I strongly question the idea of the highrises and agree that shops and small shopping strips, which become hangouts for teenagers, don't work.

7

8

7 To connect Edgeley to the city, streets have been added by using gaps between buildings and by removing forty units. A road runs around the periphery of the development, allowing for vehicle access to every unit.

8 The units lost by the street system were replaced by new narrow units and larger 3-storey units of better design. A former central park is now the site of two 6-storey apartment buildings. New units have been added to the north area. New rear fences and trees are also part of the proposal



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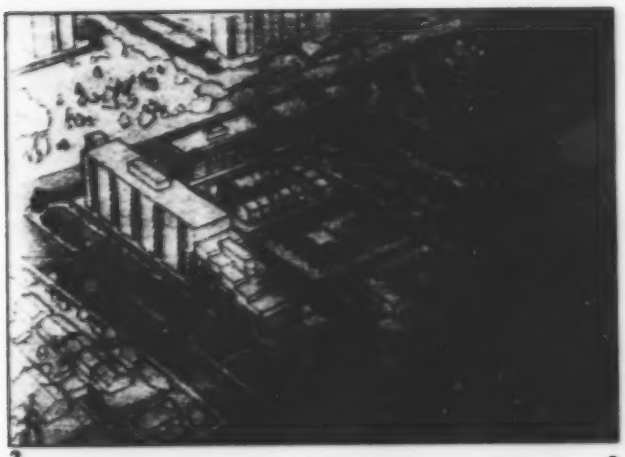

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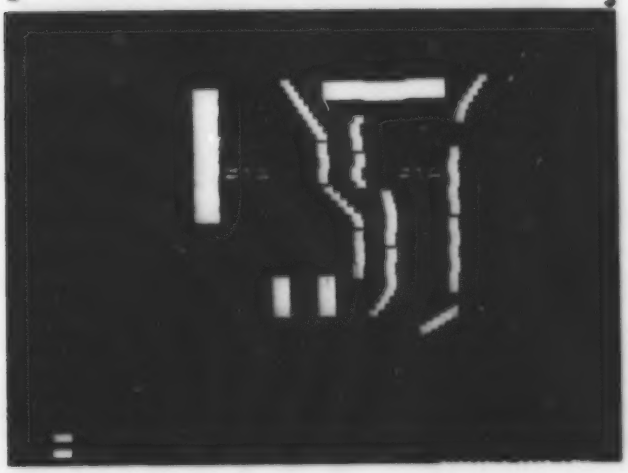

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Finch -Birchmount, Jack Diamond

The Finch-Birchmount project, consisting of a 12-storey highrise and surrounding townhouses, is located in a single-family residential Scarborough neighbourhood. Crime, especially drug-dealing, is a problem in the development.

Our overall objectives for the project included: integrating the development into the neighbourhood, reducing the number of open, public spaces and instead associating them with individual units or where impossible, making them clearly "public" with proper surveillance and maintenance, and uniting the pedestrian walkways with the street system and the street system to the neighbourhood. We also wanted to give each unit its own address and identity and were concerned with making the project consistent internally as well as externally. To reach these ends, we would be building more buildings while creating smaller units.

Consider the apartment building. Twenty apartments per floor line long corridors and share a central 3-elevator core. We plan to break down this arrangement by splitting the building into two parts and adding a second elevator core at one end of the building. In this way, the 20 units are divided by the two cores, resulting in 10 units per corridor segment. New apartments are then added onto the building by providing scissor stairs in the middle of the structure and wrapping the new construction around them. This also allows the stairs to exit on the ground floor next to the lobby. Essentially, we get three buildings out of the present circumstance of one.

To provide public activities and to reclaim control of the lobbies, entrances and staircases (the latter being a hangout for drug dealers), the day care, laundry and service centre are relocated in a cluster on the ground floor off Birchmount. The rest of the ground floor and the second floor above are converted to 2-storey walk-up units. These could be extended out on the ground floor level to make them independent of the highrise.

In the townhouse area, there are no streets, only a cul de sac driveway to an underground garage (blocked off because it's unsafe) and a dead-end driveway to the apartment building. We propose to eliminate these entirely and provide through streets across the project, connecting it to Finch Avenue. The large open space in the middle of the development will be reduced and

1 Existing site perspective. On the townhouse side, there are no streets, only a cul de sac leading to an underground garage and a dead-end driveway to the apartment building.

2 The proposed layout of the neighbourhood. The architects want to achieve smaller units while building more buildings in the townhouse area, and to increase the useability in the highrise.

3 Existing site plan. The isolated buildings, separate from each other in the landscape are notions from the Modern movement.

FINCH-BIRCHMOUNT

divided by a street. The housing, set up rather haphazardly in this central space, will be reorganized in an orderly way. Additions mostly occur along the city grid, creating a road system and identifiable open space. The presently indistinguishable spaces at the fronts or backs of the units will be made into defined back yards. Each townhouse will have a porch and parking at the front for convenience, access and identity. The poor structures along Finch Avenue will be replaced with appropriate buildings that complement others along that street.

Parking for the added highrise units will be underneath the new construction, extending the existing underground lot, while parking for the existing and infill portions of the townhouse scheme will be on the street.

The people to be displaced—those in the central and in the back-to-back townhouses—have been kept to a minimum, and the changes will occur in phases so that some new units will be ready to move into as tenants move out of the old.

Jack Diamond is a well-known Toronto architect and is principal of the firm, A.J. Diamond, Architects and Planners.

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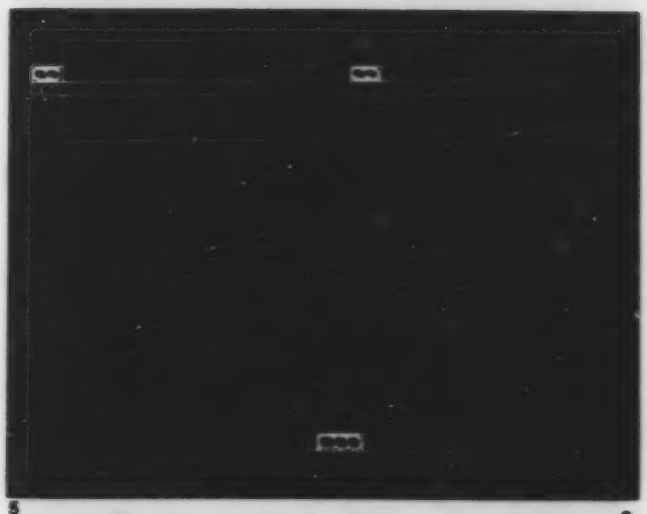

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4 Proposed site plan. Additions, shown in solid white, occur mostly along the city grid or act to identify public space.

The length of the corridor is
en down from its present
rmula of a 3-elevator core
into two parts with two 2-elevator cores.

6 Changes to the townhouse include adding a front porch and defining the fronts and rears of the units.

Oscar Newman

Although most of the residents live in the highrise, most of the money is being spent on the townhouses and walk-ups. Yes, the architect has succeeded in improving the townhouse situation by introducing an internal street system and the front and back yards, but the highrise has 257 out of the total 379 units—a very high density on a very small acreage. In the highrise, where only about 20% of the units are 3-bedrooms and the rest are 1-and 2-bedrooms, the first two floors could be converted to 3-bedroom townhouses, extending the balconies out so as to give people more space at the ground level. The other floors could be kept as they are—1-and 2-bedroom for singles and couples.

Replacing the back-to-back townhouses with multi-family housing at the top of the scheme will not solve the fundamental density problem with this site. I prefer the concept of the back-to-backs for the whole site.

Alice Coleman

A lot of thought has gone into this presentation. My comments are as follows: change as little as possible because it uproots people. Be aware of the ratio of flats to houses: the more flats, the more problems there are. I suggest leaving the back-to-back units and creating a through road between the highrise and the townhouses, which would carry through to a public street. I would also retain the cul de sac, which would save units as well. Eliminating the path and giving the residents back yards is a good idea.

Although the number of units per entry in the highrise is not reduced to what it should be, I understand cost is a factor, and I recognize that what's been done is a step in the right direction.

This neighbourhood needs time to grow up. Although it won't grow up in the highrise, some progress has been made in the townhouses and in the cul-de-sac, which already has private housing on one side. There has been talk of concentrating on "social engineering" in projects like this—moving people around to achieve the magic mix of 35% low or moderate income people amongst moderate and middle income earners. I don't agree with moving people around like pawns, imposing a social mix. When there's a choice, the introverts will seek the quiet streets, the extroverts more life and action. In public housing, we simply plank all sorts of people together, pleasing neither the ones who have to move nor the neighbourhoods on the receiving end. Building more housing projects and giving people a choice would be a better solution.

Antonio Di Mambro

I can see two major problems with this proposal. First, there's too much going on for this site, and second, is it worth the cost? What is it that you get back from this "substantial intervention?" Vertically slicing the highrise requires a cost benefit analysis to see what you're getting for the dollar spent. At the same time, I don't think the building can be refitted with three new cores while people are in the building.

Placing 2-storey walk-ups on the ground and second floor of the highrise is a good idea; the rest of the building could be refitted for 1-and 2-bedroom apartments for the elderly and small families. But putting the community facilities on the street side of the highrise while most of the people live on the other side where the townhouses are, is doubtful.

The architect has added two 6-storey buildings along the top of the scheme, but placing families along a major street has the makings of a disaster.

Response by Architect

We're talking about people having a choice in same breath as we're talking about people who can't afford the rent for the smallest apartment. Choice would be the utopian position; we have to deal with reality. We're providing housing for people to live in and to better their circumstances.

The density of 35 units per acre as is or the 54 proposed is low, compared with the Hydroblock or Dundas and Sherbourne projects in Toronto, which work extremely well at 80 units per acre.

As for disruption, we're removing 33 townhouses—to be demolished in phases so these people will not be displaced from the neighbourhood—and 7 apartments.

Is installing the elevator cores worth the money? It leaves only 100 units per entrance and 10 apartments per corridor, a substantial improvement.

ST. JAMES TOWN

St. James Town, John Gladki

St. James Town has the largest concentration of high-rise buildings in metropolitan Toronto, and the highest density in terms of persons per acre in the country. Eighteen buildings, housing 12,000 tenants in 7,000 units, sit on its 52 acres. Surrounded by ravines, a historic cemetery and the wealthy suburbs of Cabbagetown and Rosedale, the development is located on prime land within walking distance to Toronto's downtown core.

Many low-income people live in St. James Town, the average income being only 31% of the city's average. A wide variety of ethnic backgrounds can be found amongst the residents, 34% of whom have a mother tongue other than English. About 2,000 senior citizens also reside here. All find St. James Town attractive for its controlled, reasonable rents.

The buildings are anywhere between 23 and 33 storeys high and, in age, range from 20 to 30 years old. Four of the 18 are owned by the Metro Toronto Housing Authority; the others are privately owned. Although at one time St. James Town was part of the city fabric, no public streets run through the development now. Most of the land, including the paved areas for vehicular traffic, is private. According to our estimates, about $2.5 million in rent is paid every month, and of this, $1.1 million is operating income for the private owners before mortage payments and income tax.

When St. James Town was first built, it was designed for the upwardly mobile, offering a whole series of recreational facilities in a central, yet park-like setting. The main selling point was the airiness and spaciousness of the buildings and the fact there were views from many of the balconies. Many residents still value this.

When many of the units started to deteriorate almost beyond the point of repair, the MTHA became involved. The damage to the building exteriors was evident, but there was also the decaying underground garages, the ill-defined entrances, the vandalized lighting, the poor parking and circulation systems, the generally poor building and grounds maintenance, the substandard garbage receptacles and collection, and so on. The tot lots that were available were underused because their locations, usually in shade, prevented proper supervision.

Clearly St. James Town needed some attention, and MTHA believed it was its responsibility to ensure it continue to offer quality, affordable housing. The MTHA also felt it had a role in the rehabilitation process and as a public body, it felt that municipal services, such as well-lit streets, snow and garbage

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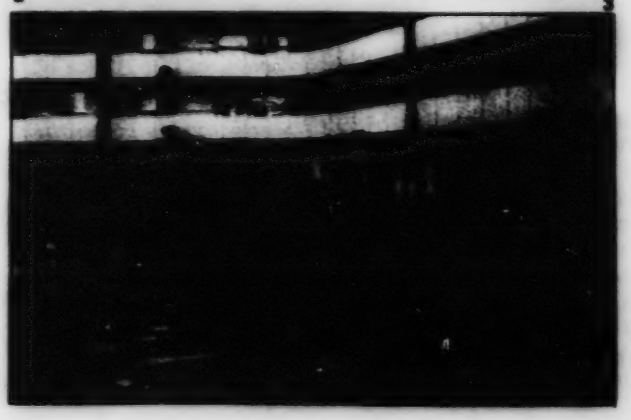

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1 Site plan. The school is the long building in the middle, the four MTHA-owned buildings are at the left along the street.

2 Salt and weather were taking their toll on the underground garages.

3 Unsightly garbage bins are located very close to the units and tend to smell in the summertime.

ST. JAMES TOWN

4

5

4 Tot lots and play areas are underused because their locations prevented proper supervision.

5 St. James Town has the largest concentration of high-rise buildings in metropolitan Toronto and the highest density in terms of persons per acre in the country.

removal and pavement repairs, should be available to the community.

When we first became involved, the tenants organized a legal clinic, which in turn organized a series of meetings of building representatives. This tenant council was sought for advice on various revitalization efforts and is involved in three initiatives. One initiative concerns the small cosmetic improvements. About $1 million will be spent on such things as new paving, benches and trees to spruce up the area in front of the local school, which is the focal point of, and a gathering place for, the neighbourhood.

The second initiative involves the improvement of the parking garages, the areas around the buildings and the buildings themselves. The MTHA has allocated $10 million for these changes. Finally, as the third initiative, we hope to study the 14 private buildings—to determine their condition, the improvements that are needed, and methods of financing. As well, the social fabric of neighbourhood will be studied, based partially on tenant input and feedback. The real challenge for the MTHA is to motivate the private owners enough that they want to invest funds in an improvement program.

The St. Lawrence housing project, planned by the city with funding from various government levels, has provided a good model for St. James Town. It embodies many of the principles of successful neighbourhood-making. All of its buildings front the street, they're of varying heights, and offer a choice of tenure form, either public, non-profit, or ownership housing. The well-defined public areas contain services that are used by the residents of the neighbourhood.

What is our idea of a utopian St. James Town? We'd like to re-introduce streets to eliminate many of the surface paved areas and to re-direct parking underground to eliminate the surface parking areas. The garbage would be collected from pavillions rather than from outdoor bins. Some services would be introduced to the neighbourhood, such as a library and mini-police station. As for the spaces in between the buildings, they would be re-examined, and those with large amounts of sunshine would be outfitted for recreational and play areas. We would also like the areas in front of the buildings to function as front porches.

John Gladki is manager of Policy of the City of Toronto's Planning Department

ST. JAMES TOWN

Newman:

The sheer size of St. James Town, the number of units and its importance as a resource makes it an interesting study. A complicated one too when one considers that it's 75% privately owned. Our examination of the 4 public buildings showed that they were better managed and maintained than the private ones.

I don't believe you have enough data on the project, or if you have, you don't seem to have grasped the problem. There is, for example, far more doubling up of apartments here than in the private sector.

In comparison with the St. Louis project that was dynamited a decade after it was built, St. James Town is much bigger, has higher towers and longer corridors, but it has a better bedroom count. This makes a crucial difference. In St. Louis, most of the units were 3-, 4- and 5-bedroom units while only 5% of the apartments here are 3-bedroom, the rest being largely 1-bedroom units and studios. Large families have difficulty living here, unlike in St. Louis, where eventually the load on the elevators, garbage, and grounds grew to be too much. A survey should be conducted here to determine the actual number of families in the private buildings. It may be partly the answer to the problems in these buildings.

How do you get control of the private sector? First, if the land has been leased at low cost to the owners or if they've been given a tax abatement, you may have some leverage to make changes. Second, you could make the landlords' lives miserable by enforcing codes that restrict the number of tenants. Third, if the private holdings are really a "cash cow"--and I've reason to believe that if they haven't been making a 25% profit for their owners, they would have been turned into condominiums long ago—they should be obliged to turn over half of the 25% for improvements.

Alice Coleman

You mentioned that you would like the front areas of the buildings to function as porches. I also noticed that in front of many buildings a waist-high brick wall has been topped with jagged stones expressly to discourage sitting and congregating! My guess is that the stones were added in response to complaints of teenagers hanging around the entrance. I recommend that a fence be placed around the front areas to indicate that they are private rather than open green space, and encourage congregating where it's already happening, in front of the school, for example.

As far as the underground parking garages are concerned, we've looked at many parking arrangements, and so far haven't found any that are fully satisfactory, especially because tenants want to park their cars where they can see them. Small, private garages may be the best answer.

There seems to be a problem with migration, moving people on within a reasonable amount of time. You don't want tenants to be stuck there if St. James Town is to be of optimum use.

Finally, about streets. I agree that a formal street system would work better than formless paved areas. Streets work best when they're flanked by a privately-owned space.

Antonio Di Mambro

While I admire your approach, I don't think you're addressing the problems of population mix and ownership. I see the makings of a potential disaster here due to things beyond anyone's control. Average house prices in Toronto have gone up 36% in one year. Two or three years of such increases, and there'll be a terrible overcrowding of public housing. The same thing happened in Boston, and public housing rents went up to $1,200 from $700. I suggest you get into some kind of ironfist agreement with the private owners or buy out their buildings.

Although you talk now of cosmetic changes to the grounds and exteriors, in about 5 years you'll be confronted with the overall rehabilitation of the buildings. I advise you to think about this issue now. If you wait, you may be faced with the nightmare of moving 800 families per building to alternative housing.

The third issue concerns me most—the garbage. Resolving the garbage problem with pavilions is an architect's dream. It's a management issue, really, and in projects such as these, garbage should be collected twice daily if need be.